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L E T T E R

T O

L O R D N O R T H.



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L E T T E R

To the RIGHT HONOURABLE

L O R D N O R T H:

Attempting to shew

The CAUSES and the REMEDIES

O F T H E

High Price of PROVISIONS,
upon a New Plan.

Si quid novisti rectius istis,
Candidus imperti ; si non, his utere mecum.

HOR.

L O N D O N:

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OF THE HISTORY OF THE

ROYAL SOCIETY OF MEDICINE

OF THE HISTORY OF THE

ROYAL SOCIETY OF MEDICINE



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L E T T E R

T O

L O R D N O R T H.

MY LORD,

AS your abilities, your humanity
and public station point you
out as the fittest person to pro-
vide relief in the high price of com-
mon provisions; so there seems to be a
general expectation of this service at
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your hands. You can certainly engage in none, which will distinguish your administration with greater honour, more indebted you to mankind, or reward your labours with truer satisfaction—For it is a work, my Lord, of Universal Charity and Reformation—I join reformation, because the sequel of this Letter will endeavour to shew that it is essential to the relief. The task is difficult in itself, and has been made still more so, by many mistaken notions of the causes, and as many inadequate or impracticable propositions of remedy. But most alarming is the evil, when we see the Legislature, as if in despondency of resources, defer the consideration of it till another session, and in the mean time cancel at one stroke the whole series of laws, which the wisdom of our ancestors had from time to time established for the regulation of the markets. I lament the occasion, but

applaud the policy of the repeal, that is, considered as a momentary expedient only for the service of the Capital, and proceeding upon the firm intention of enacting new laws, upon the good principles of the old ones, and more able to cope with every new species of abuse; with which fraud and finesse have corrupted commerce.

Every day calls more and more for redress; and we are now entering upon winter with very insufficient stores, as dear-bought experience will soon convince.

The hand of Providence was exceedingly bountiful in the harvest of last year, yet some baneful influence robbed us of the blessing—Corn was still scarce and dear.—It has pleased Heaven to disappoint the hopeful prospect of the present year (in the North especially) by incessant rains, insomuch that

not one half of the crop is fit either for bread or beer.

It is within my own knowledge, to declare that great quantities of old malt have been bought for re-sale at forty-eight shillings the quarter, and sold to the consumer at fifty-two.

Wheat in the same markets sells at nine shillings the bushel; and the farmer parts with it unwillingly, hugging himself in the hopes of a better price—It needs not the pains of calculation to shew, that beer in its several kinds, which is considered as a standard article, both as to measure and value, and is not to be varied without great distraction, cannot be honestly made and delivered out by the brewer at the usual rates—And what will become of British valour, if this source of it is stopt? Why, my Lord, it will be exceedingly

ceedingly bold against the King and his Ministers—whom public clamour is always ready to arraign for every misfortune. Your Lordship will, nevertheless, go on, like the great Apostle, through good report, and evil report, in a faithful discharge of the duties of your high commission;—You will Condescend, from your exalted rank, to acquaint yourself with the oeconomies of private life, in order to consult its ease and convenience; and listen to every author, though obscure as myself, who offers you schemes for the public good.

In this confidence, I shall endeavour to investigate the causes of the present distress, and to intimate some of the means of remedy—but I would first propose to your Lordship, or whoever employs their thoughts on this subject, one question to be settled, as most essential to the enquiry, and the very
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foundation

foundation of any permanent and effectual law :

Does England, in the common run of years, produce provisions enough for the support of its inhabitants or not? In the one case we must seek assistance from *abroad*, in the other from a reform at home. Every writer who names this Island speaks of its superabundance; and its fertility is commonly thought to be improving, and its people to decrease.

It is my full persuasion in the case, that scarcity and dearth (except in the article of corn at the present juncture) is not chargeable to the want of production.

My Lord, I was an active and observing man five and twenty years ago, when the great mortality befel our cattle; and I date from that period an extraordinary

traordinary revolution in the price of provisions.

Every thing before was too cheap, to pay the farmer for his labour, and the landlord his rent, and in fact the lessor tenants were the most indigent people in this kingdom—Never was the paradoxical adage *πλεον ἥμισυ παντός* more verified than by the event; for the remaining stock was more valuable than the whole, and I have heard numbers of farmers attribute their fortunes to this calamity—But as the condition of the farmer improved, and a higher average price of provisions seemed to be established, the landlord imposed a greater rent; and the advance through the kingdom has been so large and so general for the last twenty years, that we may fairly reckon it at twenty five *per cent.*—It is seldom computed at so little.

When we add to this burden on the farmer the many new and increased taxes—together with every purchased article of his consumption at a dearer rate—his workmen, servants, and labourers wages, amounting in the whole to at least five *per cent.* more—his increased rent will stand at thirty *per cent.*—Be it more or less, it is certainly very considerable, and in the first view demonstratively operates in its proportion in advancing the produce of his farm.

The improvements of modern husbandry are frequently mentioned as a counter-balance to the rack of rents. I am afraid they consist more in theory than in general use; and that the benefit arising from them is more than exceeded by the expensive fashion of living, which all ranks of people have assumed.

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The ability of our good Mother-country to nourish her children, is so evident to me, that I think she could maintain twice the number of industrious and sober inhabitants; but alas! my Lord, the generality of our Brethren are of a different character. She has many millions of prodigal sons, to waste her substance.—They are not reduced as yet to feed upon husks; but, my Lord, too much of that staff of life, the corn of this country, is *Drank* and not *Eat*.

The still and the cauldron pour it forth in oceans, for the purposes of debility and destruction; and it is plain to me, for I have made the calculation, that the sober man, who drinks but his two pots of Porter a day, consumes six times as much corn in his liquor as he would use in bread, though he eat little else,

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What immense quantities of corn are in the next place devoted to the service of the stables, the demand there being vastly enlarged, not only by the increased number of horses, but as the Jehu fashion of travelling requires a greater allowance to support their vigour under so violent an exertion.—A horse at full keep eats as much corn *per* week as sixteen men, that is, about two bushels; and a full-mouthed pack of fox-hounds, with a handsome suite of horses, devours the bread of five hundred people.—When the quantity of corn consumed in these several ways is computed, how little remains, perhaps not more than the tithe, for the food of man! and yet that little is robbed in its preparation of bread, even for the poor, of near one fifth part of its substance, to make it more specious and less wholesome. For brown, or even household bread, is seldom seen but at the tables
of

of the great, to gratify squeamish appetites by variety.

Bread is not only enhanced in its price by these means, but is made still dearer ; and much debased in its quality, since the disuse of making it at home, and the almost universal custom in the country, as well as in the towns, of receiving it through the hands of the flourman and the baker ; the former, who is an Ingrosser by profession, having first bought a stock of corn on as good terms as he can, employs himself in the next place to raise the price of it, sometimes bidding, as this writer has been a witness, more than the farmer asks him in the market. The baker, when furnished with his grist by the flourman, practises all the arts of adulteration, in which bean-meal, plaister, whiting, and alum, are the usual ingredients.

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The labourer and mechanic, who wishes for his corn in the grain, and to bake it at home, knows neither where to buy nor to grind it; he must use bakers bread, or have none. The trades I have been describing of the baker and flour-man are extremely inconvenient and pernicious; and nothing but a law for supplying the markets with corn, to be sold out in small quantities, can deliver the poor from the mischief.—If cheap and capable mills were constructed, for the use of private families and little neighbourhoods, and opened by noblemen and gentlemen on their estates, on generous terms, the abuses I have last named would be removed from the poor, and the rest of us should know what it is we eat in the form of bread.

The invention is worthy of a good premium; and I have reason to believe, from some experiments that have been
made,

made, an apparatus for the purpose might be fitted to a good smoke-jack.

I need not enlarge on this part of the subject; for though there are many other causes contributing to the scarcity and dearness of corn, yet these which are enumerated are quite sufficient, when united in their operation, to produce the effects. And when I speak of corn promiscuously, I suppose every one will draw this inference for himself, that whatever is spent or may be saved in one species of it, so much more, or so much less, will be produced in another.

I proceed, with your Lordship's patience, to observe upon the case of butchers meat. And as many of the same causes which affect the price of corn, particularly high rents, extravagant living, unreasonable profits; and, above all, the iniquities of ingrossing
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and regrating, are applicable to this and many other items of provisions, I desire to refer to them severally, without recapitulation.

The dairy business has scarcely been remarked upon by writers on this subject, and yet it is an object which claims a principal attention, as it already occupies a great proportion of our lands, and is extending itself over more. — One chief production of it, which is butter, should meet with every discouragement that can be given it, not only as the last of all necessaries, if it must be called one, but as most unwholesome when used in excess; and this commodity is nearly doubled in its consumption within a few years past. I verily believe nearly one half of it is spent in the morning and evening repasts of the vulgar teatable, and need say no more in the execration of it.

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As to cheefe, it is a very useful victual, to relish a good meal, to eke out a scanty one, or furnish a hasty dinner to the poor ; besides, it wants no cookery, and will keep for many years. The present high price of it is owing, in addition to the general causes, to the enlarged exportation of late years into the northern climates.

Another mischief of the dairy business, especially of the butter dairies, is the decrease it occasions in the breed of cattle ; for this kind of dairyman finds it turn to his better account to slaughter the calves produced in the spring (which is the general season of fecundity) than to rear them for store ; some of the best are fattened by the suckler, the rest perish at a few days old. The dairies in the south are supplied with fresh stock, as it is wanted, from distant counties ;

counties ; and scarcely ox, bull, or cow, is reared upon them.

I have next to observe, that the consumption of flesh meat is much greater than formerly, and that the lower class of people are not only more carnivorous, but more delicate in their taste. Instead of a general slaughter at the fall of the leaf, which used to be the practice, and preserving it for winter use, every body now requires it fresh and fat throughout the year ; and whoever is acquainted with winter feeding, at the rate which corn and oil-cake now bear, will scarcely undertake to furnish beef in the spring at eight-pence the pound ; indeed the winter feeder will never count a profit, unless he nearly doubles the autumnal price. The charitable associations which were formed last winter in London, for accommodating the poor with provisions, and were disappointed in

in their good intentions, might probably succeed better in their plan, by buying and ~~selling~~ ^{or altering} beef at this season, when it is at the lowest, and distributing it through the winter months.

I have now done with general remarks; and have only a word or two to say upon the case of the two great Cities of London and Westminster, as distinguished from other places: in them, as we must naturally expect, extravagance, dissipation, and precarious credit on the one hand; extortion, combination, fraud, and adventure on the other; reign in their full perfection, and of consequence all the mischiefs I have been speaking of are more predominant.

The repealing act of last session (mentioned already) describes them as subject to the absolute dominion of ingrossers and regrators. It is hoped Par-
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liament,

liament, so sensible as it is of this, will take immediate care to correct the abuse.

The grazier, as I am well informed, seldom finds any other advantage in the Smithfield-market than a certain sale and ready money: the price of live cattle at an average is rather less there than in the distant countries, and yet meat in the retail is about thirty *per cent.* dearer.--In other things, such as herbs, fruits, poultry, fish, &c. the exaction is still greater, and the different price betwixt the first hand they go through and the last often exceeds an hundred *per cent.*—There is another most pitiable cause of dearth and distress in these cities; I mean, the long credit taken with tradesmen, too often long as till Doomsday---and we daily see shop-keepers in full business failing at
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the West end of the town---with many illustrious names in their books.

I have, my Lord, in these pages, presented you with a long catalogue of grievances; but I bring no flaming remonstrance along with them.---They are the works of our own hands; and the prayer of my petition to your Lordship is, to save us, if possible, from pulling down ruin on ourselves.

I observed, in the setting out, the difficulty of the task, and that many inadequate and impracticable proposals had been made on the subject.—We must account all methods to be such, that would directly infringe the constitution of this country, and rather suffer the inconveniences of liberty than curb it too hard. The spirit of the times runs very high, and must be delicately treated---but no times would ever sub-

mit to the rule of Legal Commissaries, to apportion our farmers, to settle our rents, to prescribe the course of our husbandry, or stamp a price upon our property ; and as vainly would laws pretend to arrest the Phaëton or the Fox-hunter in the midst of his career, or, dash the goblet from the mouth of the Sot. It is, my Lord, the gradual and silent operation of wholesome reformatory institutions, digested into good laws, which must accomplish the end.

They are the only probable means to restore plenty ; and plenty once restored, cheapness and reduction will follow of course.

Foreigners are apt to tell us, we have a bad police.---No, my Lord, we are in a worse condition---we have a good one, and it is ill observed.

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Its foundations are excellent, and the ablest politicians cannot rebuild upon better. This people in past ages were religious, honest, sober, and modest; and our statute books, which are the best historians in this matter, inform us of the discipline which made them so—we shall there read of proper correction provided for every bad citizen.— The Sabbath breaker, the traveller or trader on Sunday, the absenter from the worship of God, the profane, the blasphemer, the ingrosser, the forestaller, the regrator, the disorderly publican, the tippling customer, the negligent parent or master, the wicked and undutiful child, servant, or apprentice, the gamester, the lewd and idle, &c. &c. in short every evil-doer, was called to a strict account. I will not expatiate on the mortifying contrast which public example now exhibits. I think of the consequences with horror; and

one of the least of them is, that, unless some check is given to loose and profligate manners, we shall soon be strangers both to peace and plenty---I mean from natural causes only, for the judgments of an avenging God are not esteemed a part of political deliberations.

Nor do I presume to press your Lordship from topics of religion: I know you reverence it in your heart, and exemplify it in your practice; and surely, wherever honour, or piety, or a sense of decency, are felt in the soul, they must all be violated, to see our Sabbaths turned into Bacchanalian feasts, and the Holy Faith, which we justly boast of as professed in its greatest purity, scandalized by enormities unknown in all other civilized nations, whether Protestant or Popish, Jewish or Gentile.

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—A stranger, my Lord, whether passing upon our roads, or speculating in our cities, might well imagine Sunday to be the Grand Festival of Satan—though the revel is continued through the whole week. I am leading your thoughts to the public houses opened for the purposes of lewdness and debauchery, or, which is the same thing, subject to no actual visitation to controul them—And I have now named the greatest nuisance that infests this land; for the whole family of Disease, Villainy, Beggary, and Famine, are engendered there—The governours, for the most part, are the roaring sons and daughters of Licentiousness, and their houses the graves of Innocence, the schools of Thieves—and the slaughter houses for the Gallows.—Nothing that has been mentioned has a more immediate connection with the inquiry in hand—

and when the question comes to this, “shall the drunkard have his vomit—or the poor his bread?” Can it ask a moment’s consideration with a wise and good government how to decide it—though half the revenue was the purchase. The man who stands before kings must one day stand in the presence of his Maker; and he will be found a traitor to them both, and as unwise as he is impious, who makes public vice necessary to the support of the throne.

It is a real zeal which glows in these paragraphs, unmeaning any personal applications, and least of all to your Lordship; I have far other sentiments towards you: but I humbly hope and conceive, that revenue may be repaired in its loss by other taxes of a more salutary and honest nature,

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From my own experience as an old magistrate, I will venture to augurate, that, if these petty and mischievous haunts of idleness were suppressed, the substantial and creditable innholders, continuing to be licensed, would gladly compensate for the stamp-duties at least. And the further diminution might in some measure be supplied by taxes upon sporting horses and dogs, livery servants, and many other supernumerary wants.—The transfer from one object to the other would be a measure extremely popular—The farmer would bless the author of it, for mulcting the trespasser on his fields; and every regular inhabitant, for restoring quiet to his neighbourhood.

Whether the distilleries should be entirely stopped, or only limited in respect to corn—nobody can properly advise,

vise, without a perfect knowledge of the condition of this year's crop---perhaps it will be better to allow the damaged part of it for this use, provided it is first surveyed, and condemned as fit for no other, than expose more useful materials to this consuming fire.—The mention of a survey suggests the idea of a general one to be made through the kingdom, by the agency of the magistrates, and their appointed officers, of the whole stock of corn, both old and new; and of a power to be given them by act of parliament to call it forth to market, in due proportion, till another year; trusting to Providence, and to our universal commerce, for a timely replenishment.

No hardships or commotion, that I foresee, would attend this step; and it
would

would be equally popular with the former. If it be found feasible, I little doubt the success.

The very apprehension arising upon such a scrutiny would make the further prosecution of it partly unnecessary, as it would quicken the persons possessed of large hoards, in threshing them out for sale, and convert Avarice itself into an instrument of Liberality.

Besides, my Lord, it would convince the reasonable part of mankind, I had almost said the very populace, that Government has not that inattention to their wants, which they are apt to lay to its charge. It may also happily restrain their hands, in the day of their calamity, from violence and spoliation, and save Authority the pain it always feels

feels in rigorous severities against the miserable hunger-impelled delinquents.

It is now too late to augment the crop of wheat in the ground by the ordinary way of husbandry: but as every endeavour should be employed for the supply of another year, it is worth while to observe, that this grain, sown in February or March, upon the lighter wheat-lands, has been found, upon some late trials, to bear a good crop, and ripen in due time.

If what I am going to say in the conclusion exposes my weakness more than any thing before, it is a weakness I am not ashamed of. The poor despised Jew abjures pork and bacon--- The starving Frenchman, at certain times, rejects every savory morsel—I have tempted the hunger of them both,
and

and they will not eat.—And shall the Englishman alone, sick and surfeited with repletion, for ever sacrifice to his belly as his God? and will he not, for one or two days in a week, be contented with a luxurious fast, and allow a Carnival to the poor? Yes, my Lord, he will do and suffer any thing, when animated by Great example, and inspired by a Public cause; and whether you smile at my simplicity, or not, I am serious in the thought, that with due promotion, and in charity to the poor, much the greater part of the full-fed families of this kingdom would rejoice in two days abstinence in the week, both above and below stairs—whether proposed to common consent, or enacted by a law.

I beg pardon for the freedom and prolixity of this letter; and if it is happy
 enough

enough to furnish one hint that may be
useful, I have my reward.

I am,

With great Respect,

YOUR LORDSHIP'S

Most obedient humble Servant,

(And what the Patriot should be)

AMICUS PATRIÆ.





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